

Remarks Prior to Discussions With Foreign Minister Yevgeniy Primakov of Russia and an Exchange With Reporters in New York City

September 22, 1997

The President. Let me briefly say that it's a pleasure for me to see Foreign Minister Primakov here and to renew our relationship and our dialog. You also know that the Vice President is now in Moscow for his regular meeting with Prime Minister Chernomyrdin. And we have a lot of work to do. But I am very encouraged at the progress in our relationships and in our partnership over the last year or so.

I had a great meeting with President Yeltsin in Helsinki. We were together again in Paris and, of course, in Denver. And among other things, Mr. Primakov and I will be discussing our partnership in Bosnia and our partnership for arms control today—places where we look forward to greater progress.

So I'm glad to see him, and I'm delighted to have this chance to visit.

Would you like to say anything?

Foreign Minister Primakov. Thank you very much for receiving me, Mr. President. It is a great honor for me and also a chance to discuss the issues that you have just mentioned. I've brought for you a message from President Yeltsin. This is the reply to your latest message to him. You will see that, for yourself, it mentions our very big interest in having our relations with the United States develop further on many tracks, not just our desire to do so but also our willingness.

Last night we had a very exciting, very productive talk with the Secretary of State. And already, based on that talk, I got a signal coming from Moscow—Madam was asking why I am not being authorized to do certain things. Well, most probably what is at issue is the protocol, because that's something that your Vice President already mentioned. [Laughter] This is to indicate the rapid way the United States operates, and we are far removed, as yet, from that. [Laughter]

The President. Thank you very much.

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Q. Mr. President, the Justice Department now says it apparently has memos that indicate you were urged to make another 40 fundraising calls. Sir, what do you recall of these memos, and were the calls made or were they not?

The President. Well, I've already said I don't know—I haven't read—I don't know what you're talking about on the memos because I haven't seen them, so I can't comment on that. I've already answered about the calls.

Let me just say this. I believe what the Vice President did and what I did was legal, and I am absolutely certain that we believed we were acting within the letter of the law. And I'm going to cooperate however I can to establish the facts, but I think that's important that you and the American people understand that, that I certainly—I believed then and I believe now what we did was legal. But I am absolutely positive that we intended to be firmly within the letter of the law when we were out there campaigning and raising funds as we should have been doing. We had to do that.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:45 p.m. in the U.S. Mission at the United Nations. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and President Boris Yeltsin of Russia. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at a Luncheon Hosted by Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the United Nations in New York City

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President Udovenko, members of the U.N. Secretariat, my fellow leaders. First let me thank the Secretary-General for his remarks. As some of you may know, after work today I will have the pleasure of attending the opening of the Metropolitan Opera. And I thought I would get into the spirit by singing the praises of our host today. [Laughter]

Mr. Secretary-General, it would be hard to find someone more appropriate to lead this great organization at this time. Your work and your life have taken you from your native Ghana to Egypt, Ethiopia, Switzerland, and